

BOOK REVIEWS

Essays on Indian Music

Articles by the Late Prof.

Dr Josef Kuckertz

Ed. Selina Thielemann

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This work is a compilation of thirteen articles on Indian music by the German ethnomusicologist Josef Kuckertz. The articles were originally written in German and published in various journals. Selina Thielemann, a student of the late professor, has prepared the English translations of the articles and brought them together in this book. One last article (the fourteenth) is by the editor herself, based on Dr Kuckertz's fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 1972. Professor Bruno Nettl, the U.S. ethnomusicologist, who, like Dr Kuckertz, has researched on Indian music, has contributed a foreword to the book, where he speaks about his association with Josef Kuckertz. The book also contains a bibliography of publications by Dr Kuckertz, compiled by Gisela Pieper and Selina Thielemann.

The "lead article", titled 'From Field Trip to Lecture', gives an account of Dr Kuckertz's researches in the musics and religions of non-Western cultures, and thus affords a glimpse of the latter's understanding of Indian music—North Indian and South Indian, folk, devotional, and classical. Both as regards this article, and the other articles compiled in this book, one has to say that many of the views expressed would not be acceptable to Indian scholars. Dr Kuckertz's understanding of the concept of raga and the compositional structures of various forms in classical music is flawed. His biographical information on composers in Carnatic music like Thyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar is incorrect. His translations of the texts of various compositions quoted are faulty. And the division of Indian music into folk, devotional, and classical categories is debatable.

The second article, titled 'What is Indian Mu-



JOSEF KUCKERTZ

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EDITED BY SELINA THIELEMAN

sic?', is a general introduction to the music of India. Here we come across a glaring error—the term '*sangeeta*' is not one introduced "more recently", as mentioned by Dr Kuckertz (10). In the ancient period, the term was used to denote

song, instrumental music, and dance all together: "*Gitam vadyam nrityam cha sangeetamityuchyate*"; it is only from the fifteenth century that the term came to mean music alone. There are other errors too. Annamacharya's son's name was Pedda Thirumalacharya and not Pedda Thirumalaiyyangar as mentioned on page 14. The statement that Thyagaraja, the saint composer, sang in "open space on the bank of the Kaveri river" carries no reference. Similarly, the statement that Muthuswami Dikshitar, in his later years, "took the function of the singer at the temple of the deity of Thyagaraja in Turuvurur [*sic*] near Tanjavur" (14) is incorrect. The English translation of a song by Muthuswami Dikshitar given in the article does not carry the name of the original Sanskrit composition.

Further, the description of the structure of the Kṛiti given on page 15 shows that the author has not understood the song form. The Kṛiti is not "always based on a poem". Besides, the Kṛiti and Keertanam are two different types of composition in Carnatic music. There are many variations both in the structure of the Kṛiti as well as that of the Keertanam.

Forms of Hindustani music—Dhrupad, Dhamar, and Khayal—are also dealt with in this article. Besides, it mentions the Bhajana, a form of devotional song common to South and North India; the Qawwali of North Indian religious tradition; Baul and Bhatiali songs of Bengal; Santal songs of tribal India; and various other regional musics including those of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Mistakes are inevitable in an article of such broad sweep.

The next article is 'Music in Hindu Faith and

in Islam: Two Contradictory Concepts'. Here, the author deals in general with the two religious faiths, and goes on to examine how music stands in relation to each. This is followed by an article on 'Religious Singing between Folk Song and Raga Melodics in Karnataka, South India'. In this article, the author mainly speaks of the music of Purandaradasa, a composer who is considered to be the progenitor of Carnatic music. Here again, we find evidence of the author's insufficient understanding of Indian music. The "scale belongs to the concept of Raga", says Dr Kuckertz. This is a misleading statement. The scale is very different from the raga; it is only one of the thirteen characteristics of the raga. As this fundamental principle has not been properly understood, the analysis is seriously flawed. For example, it should be remembered that folk melodies are tunes and are never assigned any scale. Also, the whole analysis of the melodics of Purandaradasa's songs has been made without understanding the melodic concept in Indian music. Therefore, at the end of the article, the author arrives at a confusing conclusion: "... the devotional content of the songs, whether rendered in folk style or as art music, would have been superior to the raga modes" (45). The texts of three Kannada songs are appended to this article in Roman transliteration, with English translations.

The fifth article is 'On Textual Understanding in the Songs of Tyagaraja'. Here, Dr Kuckertz mainly presents the texts of several Thyagaraja songs available in various books, and excerpts the comments of the authors. Thus the article is more of a compilation of materials from sundry sources on Thyagaraja than an original interpretation of Thyagaraja's songs.

'Words and Melody in South Indian Bhajana Songs' follows. The author's trip to Amara-vati near Hospet, where he listened to Kannada Bhajanas, is the source of the article. Based on the field trip, general conclusions are drawn on the interrelation between words and melody in Bhajana songs. Three songs are given in the appendix to the article—the texts in Roman transliteration, their translations in English, and the melodies in staff notation.

The seventh article is on 'Women's Songs from Badami in Karnataka, South India', dealing with a genre of Kannada folk songs. The eighth is 'Daf Songs from Central India'. This article is actually based on recordings made by the author on his field trips to Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh; the title is therefore a misnomer. The Daf is a frame drum. The songs performed to the accompaniment of this drum are labelled by the author as Daf songs, though they are not generally regarded as a distinct genre. However, in this article, we get a detailed account of the author's field trip and his mode of collecting the songs.

The next article is on 'Songs of the Santals', and is based on the author's field trips to a few Santhal villages in West Bengal. As the Santhal tribe is widely distributed over several eastern states of India—Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar and Tripura, besides West Bengal—the author's observations on Santhali music are only of limited value.

The tenth article again deals with tribal music—'Songs of the Todas'. The Todas belong to the Nilgiri hills of South India. The author details his field trip there and makes some general observations on Toda music. A song-text with a translation and notation is given at the end of the article.

The next article, titled 'Polyphony in India', offers the author more room for interpretation. It is interesting to note that the author relates the use of the drone in Indian music—"which consists either of the tonic on its own, or of a combination of the middle and upper tonics and the fifth above"—to "an inherent tendency towards polyphony" (123). However, he does not make any definite statement on the subject, choosing to draw our attention to polyphony in Indian folk and tribal music. The Bakham songs of the Western Himalayas (around Jammu) are described in detail, and the Harul songs of Jaunsar and Naga songs of Assam are also brought in as evidence of Indian polyphony. This article does give us an idea about polyphony in the northern and north-eastern hill regions of India.

The twelfth article is titled 'The Oboe in the Artistic, Folk and Tribal Music of India'. This deals with the Nagaswaram of South India and the Shehnai of North India. The author also provides a descriptive account of other kinds of oboe which are to be seen in various parts of India. These are chiefly used in tribal and folk music, and have taken various shapes.

The next article is on 'Constant Factors and Components in the Oral Transmission of Indian Music'. Here, the author discusses the variations to be found in renderings of the same composition by two well-established musicians. (Here and elsewhere, the addition of a terminal 'a' to the names of ragas and forms of music is a source of constant irritation. Not every terminal consonant in every raga's name takes an 'a'; 'Khamas' is never "Khamasa", for example. However, the editor in her note states that she has used "Sanskritized" spelling all through the book.)

Finally, we come to the last article in the book, written by Selina Thielemann, titled 'Rhythm and Meter in Sinhalese Vannama Dances: A Living Representation of Early Indian Tala?' Based on Dr Kuckertz's fieldwork, the article tries to relate the rhythmic structure of the Vannam dance of Sri Lanka with talas mentioned in early Sanskrit treatises. However, it is only a preliminary exploration of a difficult subject. "Many of the questions will be taken up in the succeeding chapter", it says on page 143, though no chapter on the subject follows. The compositions chosen for analysis are of very short duration—of a minute or less. Transcriptions of the pieces are provided. On the basis of these, there does not seem to be any kind of tala or rhythmic cycle in the drumming that accompanies the dance. The rhythm works with two, three, and four beats, and combinations of these units. Also, the syllables do not quite fall into the pattern of Indian rhythm. The tempo is not 1:2; it gradually accelerates from slow to fast. Except for the name, there seems to be no connection between the *matra* of the Sinhalese Vannam and the *matra* of Indian rhythm. The cycle of Indian rhythm is altogether

er missing in the Vannam. 'Vannam' is a Tamil word meaning colour; besides, it has many other meanings. I am not sure if the author is aware of those connotations (or Dr Kuckertz was). At any rate, several words have been wrongly rendered in English. For example, 'natakasutramunu' is translated as "drama strings"; the word actually refers to the theory (*sutra*) of drama (*nataka*). It is a Telugu word. This is just one example of the translation of vernacular expressions in this work.

Despite the shortcomings of the book, the effort made by a non-Indian scholar to study a wide range of Indian musical systems must be appreciated. The late Dr Kuckertz also deserves our appreciation for putting down the information he had gathered through his fieldwork in the form of these well-written papers. Documentation of musical information is still in its infancy in India. The present work should therefore help Indian music scholars to teach themselves how to document information gathered in the field for further analysis.

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Purnia Anchal ke Lokgeeton ka Sangeet-shashtriya Adhyayan

Anjana Ganguli

Ritugandha Prakashan,
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Purnia Anchal ke Lokgeeton ka Sangeet-shashtriya Adhyayan (A Musicological Study of the Folk Songs of the Purnia Region) is based on Anjana Ganguli's thesis for her Ph.D. from the Faculty of Music, Patna University. Anjana, who now heads the Department of Music at J. D. Women's College, Patna, comes from a distinguished family of Purnia which was known not only for its patronage of music but also for



the attainments of some of its members as performers. Her father Naresh Bhattacharjee, an alumnus of Maris College, Lucknow, and a disciple of the legendary K. C. Dey, was among the family's professional musicians. After a brief but notable stint in Bombay's film industry in the early 1950s, he had served as a composer with All India Radio.

The Purnia division of Bihar, which now comprises the districts of Araria, Katihar, Kishanganj, and Purnia, has long been known as Bihar's area of darkness. Ravaged by frequent floods, its swampy terrain was mosquito-infested. As malaria took a heavy toll of human lives every year, government officials dreaded a posting in the area. Purnia, nevertheless, remained a region where folk music reverberated from the tiniest hamlet. It is a land criss-crossed by rivulets and by rivers like the turbulent Kosi and the mighty Mahanada. The region does not appear to have had any local tradition of classical music (like, for example, Darbhanga, Bettiah, or Gaya), though of course the local zamindars (Purnia had a couple of well-known estates like Garh Banaili) used to invite reputed classical musicians to their homes.

Purnia is bounded by the terai belt of Nepal on the north, the Ganga to the south, the Jalpaiguri and Malda districts of West Bengal to the east, and Bihar's Saharsa district on the west. Possibly, it derives its name from the *purain*, a lotus-like flower; until some years ago the region abounded in tanks and ponds, with *purain* flowers in bloom throughout the year.

Culturally, the region has seen a confluence of Maithili and Bengali ways of life and traditions: it touches Mithila's heartland on its south-western fringe and Bengal on its eastern frontiers. At different points in time, the region came under the influence of rulers of different races, religions, and clans.

A large Bengali population, mostly comprising Sadgops, was introduced in the region by the Portuguese, who wielded considerable authority in eastern India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the medieval period, from the thirteenth century onwards, and till the arrival of Europeans, this belt had Muslim rulers. It has a sizeable Muslim population, a large part of which consists of migrants from the adjacent Dinajpur and Malda districts of West Bengal, as also from Chittagong and Dhaka, now in Bangladesh. They fall into two groups—Sheshawadhias and Bhatias. While the former claim to be descendents of soldiers who fought for Sher Shah against the Mughals, the Bhatias get their name from the *bhat* or fallow lands of Bengal whence they migrated in search of a livelihood. In the Kishanganj belt, which is known as Suryapur Pargana in the survey records, the Muslims speak a dialect called Surjapurja which is a mix of Bengali, Hindi, Maithili, and Nepali.

The Maithili-speaking people of Purnia have had a commanding presence in the region. This population includes natives as well as migrants from the nearby Madhubani-Darbhanga belt. In fact, many of the important Maithil Brahmin families of landlords in Purnia are known to belong to the clan to which rulers of the erstwhile Darbhanga state belonged. But they can be put into two categories, according to the author: in the first category would be those who speak what George Grierson called "standard Maithili", and in the second category those whose language is now known as Angika. Many would not agree with Anjana Ganguli on this point, and would maintain that Angika is the dialect of the Munger-Bhagalpur belt. However, the fact remains that the local language of Purnia is different from "standard Maithili".

Bhojpuri-speaking people too have a significant presence in the region. They were brought in by the British for the cultivation of jute and indigo. Some pockets of Purnia also have a Santal population.

All emigrants to this region—the Maithils, the Bhojpuris, the Bengalis—brought with them

their own languages, folklore, and folk songs. Anjana Ganguli identifies these linguistic groups and communities as the sources of folk songs of the Purnia region. Indeed, one comes across in Purnia songs in Bengali, Maithili, Angika, Bhojpuri, Santhali and Surjapurja. But these, as Anjana notes, have acquired a local colour.

Anjana Ganguli has divided her study into six chapters. The first chapter deals with the geography and history of Purnia. The second chapter is devoted to the definition and categorization of folk songs. Here the author has dealt with folk songs related to (1) *sanskaras* like the birth ceremony, thread ceremony, and marriage ceremony; (2) the seasons; (3) religious festivals; (4) agricultural activities like sowing, harvesting, grinding of grains, etc; and (5) prayers to various gods and goddesses. The latter category includes songs of the Muslims on the occasion of Muharram. There is also a sixth, miscellaneous, category.

In the songs relating to Hindu festivals and prayers, the influence of the Shakta tradition of Bengal and the Shaiva tradition of Mithila cannot be missed. The names of Shiva, Parvati, Naga (the serpent god), and Kali occur frequently in these songs.

However, as the title of the book suggests, Anjana Ganguli has taken a closer look at the musical elements of these songs than their literary content or linguistic characteristics. A full chapter has been devoted to the history of music since the Vedas. Here the author argues that folk music gradually evolved to a stage where it could acquire a grammar for itself. Classical music was a further refinement reached through this process. Thus every folk tune has an ele-

ment of classical music in it. A person trained in classical music can easily discern these musical elements in folk songs and appreciate their aesthetic qualities. However, according to Anjana Ganguli, as the social elite identified itself with classical music, folk music was denied its place as an authentic genre of music.

Anjana Ganguli's real effort in this book has gone into notating the songs she had recorded in the course of her fieldwork in the interiors of the Purnia region. She has also paid special attention to the percussion instruments which accompany the songs, and the various *talas* used in the songs. Apart from Dhamar, Rupak, Chanchar, and Khemta, *teevra talas* like Dadra and Kaharwa are also quite common in these songs. Among percussion instruments, besides the Dholak—the principal drum—the Madar, Khanjadi, Khartal and Manjira are used. But there is hardly any mention of string and wind instruments—folk song, generally, is more concerned with *tala* and *laya*. The author has also notated the beats (*theka*) of some of the *talas* used in these songs.

In venturing to research in this subject, Anjana Ganguli undertook a task which needed not only knowledge of music but a lot of physical effort. The result is worthy of appreciation by the musical community. The book is a fitting tribute by the author to the land of her ancestors and to the musical tradition of her own family.

The get-up of the book is good, and the price affordable for all. One wishes, however, that the manuscript had been blue-pencilled by an editor to eliminate some grammatical errors.

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